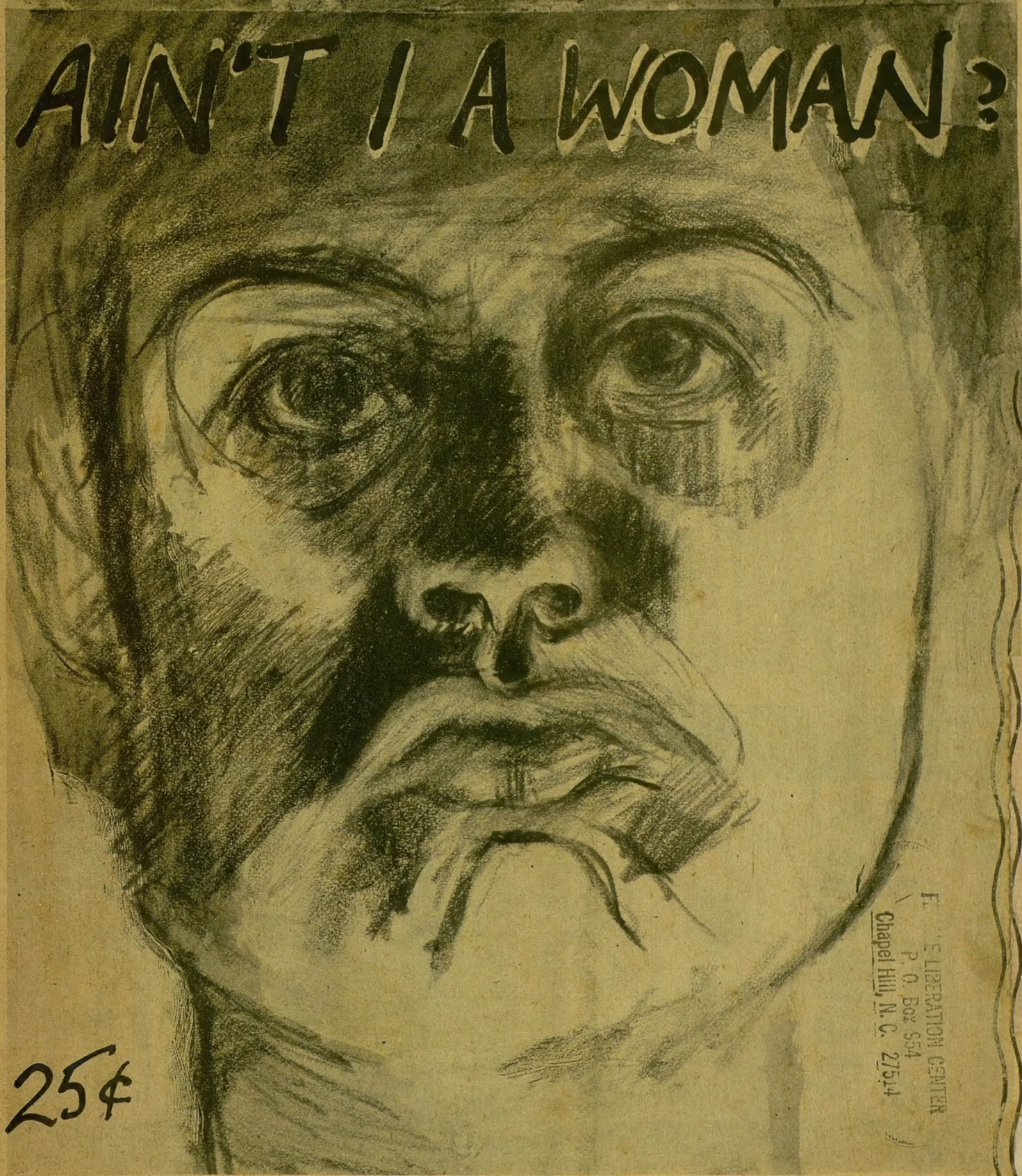
AIAW collective: iowa city, ia.

A MIDWEST NEWSPAPER OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION
VOLUME 1 NO. 17, JULY 2, 1971

AIN'T I A WOMAN?



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JUL 21 1971

Dear Del

IOWA CITY, IA 52240
Aug 1971
[illegible] LIBERATION CENTER
P. O. Box 934
Chapel Hill, N. C. 27514

AIN'T I A WOMAN?

Ain't I A Woman is published every three weeks by the Angry Independent Amazon Women P.O. Box 1169, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

We are a collective of 10 women functioning as a world wide conspiracy of Radical Lesbians.

If your group wants to receive bundles of AIN'T I A WOMAN?, you can send 15¢ per copy (minimum bundle: 20 copies) in advance.

"That man over there say that a woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me a best place... And ain't I a women.? Look at me. Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me... And ain't I a women? I could work, as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it, and bear the lash as well... And ain't I a woman? I have borned thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery. And when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard... And ain't I a woman?"

Sojurner Truth: Speech before the Woman's Rights Convention at Akron, Ohio in 1851.

In our last issue we printed a love poem by Judy Grahn and we meant to attach an explanation for those who have seen the poem. Here's how we printed it:

At the place where her breasts
come together
two thumbs width a channel,
I ride my hands to anchor
my eyes to angle.

At the place where her thighs
come together,
I said, "You smell like the ocean,"
and lay down my tongue
by the dark tooth edge of sleeping.
"Swim," she said.
And I did.
I did.

You see we have never seen it and don't have a copy of any pamphlet it appears in. It was recited to two of us in Bloomington, Indiana as we were travelling back to Iowa City by a woman from Berkeley who knew it by heart. We thought it was so beautiful--we had never heard a love poem to a woman. I made her say it over and over. Eventually I knew it by heart too and when we got back to Iowa City, I recited it to the sisters.

It's been an important part of our culture -- our sisterlove so beautifully expressed. Like so much of our culture, it is passed on and learned by word of mouth; not written, delicate, carefully told. We realized this when we wanted to print it--we had never seen a copy of it so had to guess transcribing the lines.

This issue completes our first year!

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The photo on p.9 in our last issue should have been credited to COME OUT!

announcing a women's national abortion conference
July 16,17,18 | New York City

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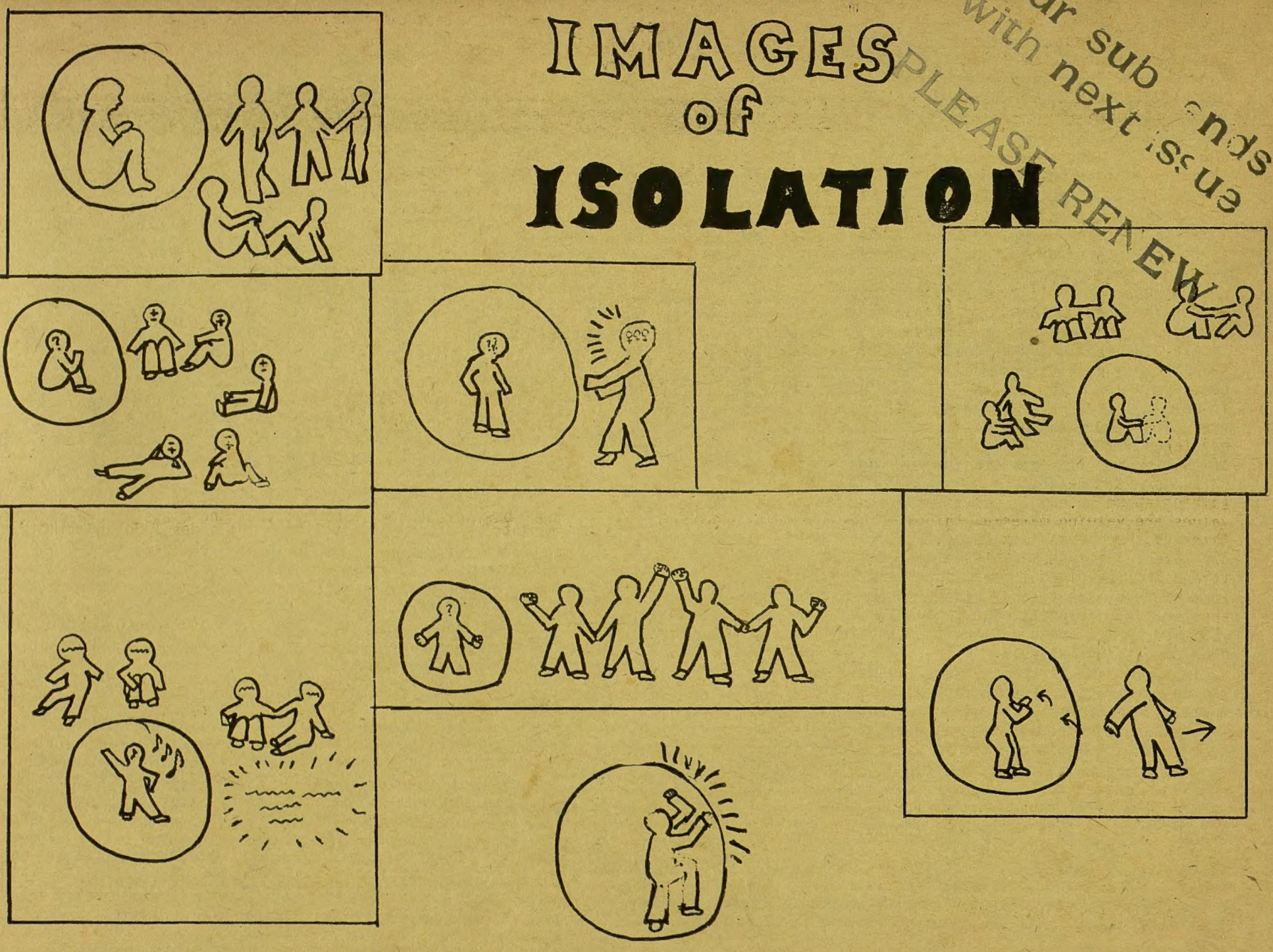
137A West 14th Street New York, New York, 10011 212-924-0894

IMAGES of ISOLATION



Starting to think about Class

I can't explain it all, even to myself - the whys and how - the rationale of why the women's movement must rid itself of its class bias. It is all so difficult that were it just thoughtful on my part, I would forget it until I could spell it all out - be sure of my reason - feel more correct. But there is nothing thoughtful about this feeling of necessity. Wanting to deal with class is necessary for my survival. I cannot think that "we're all sisters" will necessarily include me (working class). Recently I feel afraid of the women's movement, afraid of women I know - a fear that women who are not involved in the movement must feel. But I am involved and sometimes I'm scared. Enemy lines get crossed. I'm afraid of my own side. And when pushed against the wall - when I feel real class antagonism from my middle class sisters, I start seeing things totally in class terms. I start defining a class war and lose sight of any feminine consciousness I have. It's a dichotomy I know is not real but appears because we have not dealt with class in any but a superficial way. Somehow that dichotomy for me has to be broken and the class differences among us have to be dealt with, struggled with, so that our oneness is real, not just the result of ignoring the parts that don't fit.

I understand how easy it has been to ignore those parts. When I do point out how something said or done is offensive to me, I realize that even middle class women who do not react antagonistically or guilt ridden had no idea they were being offensive. Something I feel in my guts they have never thought about - been aware of. It is so difficult to explain to women who have had middle class backgrounds - to put things into a perspective that they can understand. You find that by putting things in an order that can be understood in middle class terms that the meaning is changed. You're not explaining what you orginally felt. My class feelings can't be explained in your class terms. I understand that now but for a long time I believed it when people (always middle class) would say middle class people are more articulate. If they were really liberal (and thought they were radical) they would say middle class people have been given the opportunities to develop skills in articulating. Now I see that for the subtle classist statement it is. Working class women make sense to me; middle class women just don't understand what they are saying. It's not that I'm inarticulate. It's that you don't understand. To talk about class to me is like spitting words and reactions out - like wretching all the feelings I can't explain yet. To get it out first so maybe I can see what it is that we have to explain. Yet I am always afraid to say anything when someone is offensive or antagonistic about class because everyone (including myself) thinks I'm the one to always bring up class - put people up against the wall about it. But I only bring it up when I feel really offended by something someone has said or done that is classist. So why is it assumed that I brought it up. If someone is offensive to working class women, it seems they have brought it up.

The first thing that surfaced for me that came close to a class consciousness was my reactions to some middle class things and of course with gut reactions you run a high risk of being wrong. You react negatively to something and are pushed to give some reason for your reaction. There are so many things that I know I at one time dismissed as reactionary in my parents and people in my background. And of course I learned quickly in my identification with the middle class that the working class is reactionary. The explanations they gave for their dislike of art, high culture, hippy life styles were pretty bad but maybe the basis of their hatred was something more right on than their explanations. I always react negatively to women becoming professionals or the whole drive to support women artists, lawyers, etc. But any way I try to explain that to people can be discredited right away. Once when we got into a fight about that subject, I ended up saying something like "If that's what the women's movement is all about (supporting women to become lawyers and artists) then there is no place for me". I just sounded jealous. And there is always the "I'm too damaged by my background" theory - that I should support middle class women in their attempt to reap the glories of middle class life in the name of all women since they have been less damaged and are capable of accomplishment. The middle class can only see that we don't have what they have and that that is unfair. But within those reactionary ideas we come up with are the seeds of deeper thought - like questioning if anyone should have the things they have. Middle class women miss the point: that we're attempting to question their whole existence. It's not just that I'm jealous cause I can't be part of that scene, it's that that scene is decadent - wrong.

I know most middle class women will react to this as if I am talking about material possessions - the idea that middle class values are valuing material things. They are totally blind thinking they have a monopoly of valuing things. I value money and material possessions more than most of my middle class friends - I have had to and that seems sensible to me - closer to truth - closer to what really matters to people - food, shelter, self respect. But I have a hard time valuing all their valuable ideas, their universities, their liberal, humanitarian, gracious-living bullshit.

In so much WL literature we talk about looking around and seeing the absence of women in so many fields and then proceed to talk about there being no women lawyers, artists, doctors. We looked around and all we saw was the middle class, every thing else is invisible to the middle class except "the ruling class" or "the poor" which are phrases easily used and dismissed in usual leftist rhetoric. When I was younger and I looked around I didn't see any of those professions period. And if I did they weren't from my class of people.

The only way I saw of getting out of marrying and having kids - of being self sufficient or independent was getting out of my class. There were middle class female examples supporting themselves. There were no status female jobs that I could see when I was growing up. All the jobs the men did - the men did - no exceptional women. I heard of some women - someone's older daughter - becoming a teacher or going to art school. They never lived around me and hardly ever came home. My mother would say they were high *falutin'* . But within my class (whatever that means - I realize the variations of experience - mine can't be seen as typical of all working class backgrounds) the women who did work were few. My parents' friends were all married couples. I didn't know any older single women. Anyway why did I see the only way of being independent as being something middle class - some profession. Why did I not imagine doing any of the jobs the men I knew did. I don't think I saw the possibility of supporting myself there without a man. And I wonder why we still don't talk about filling the lower class jobs but just the middle. Most jobs in this society stink but why do we think those of the middle class are better, tolerable, functional. Is there any basis for that assumption other than most of us are middle class and have obvious class bias against anything outside of that class. That most middle class women still think middle class, still accept those bourgeois values, still believe you have to do something for high reasons - to help other people, explore realms of thought, still look down on doing a job just for the money - to support yourself, still think being a professional is being functional but being an office worker is not. Anyway I choose to try and become middle class, but the only movies, books or real life class climbing, success story heroes were working class men so I totally identified with that image. Class climbing I discovered is a fallacy, and learned, too, how ambitious men are held down by having to support the women they knocked up. Women were a horrible burden to all my heros. So I couldn't stand the female role in the working class family and was a total flop anyway. I couldn't do the male thing in my class, and I didn't succeed in class climbing. Soon the belief set in "I couldn't do anything." I was absolutely awful at anything that females were supposed to do and I didn't dig men. That's something I still can't get a handle on - just how that shaped my life. I didn't get married untill I was convinced that I couldn't get anywhere (meaning to the middle class) on my own and also after my best friend who I loved married a nice boy who could support her and was moving up money wise. And when I married a long haired art student son of an immigrant truck driver, I thought we could class climb together. Dead end. He hated middle class people and wasn't interested.

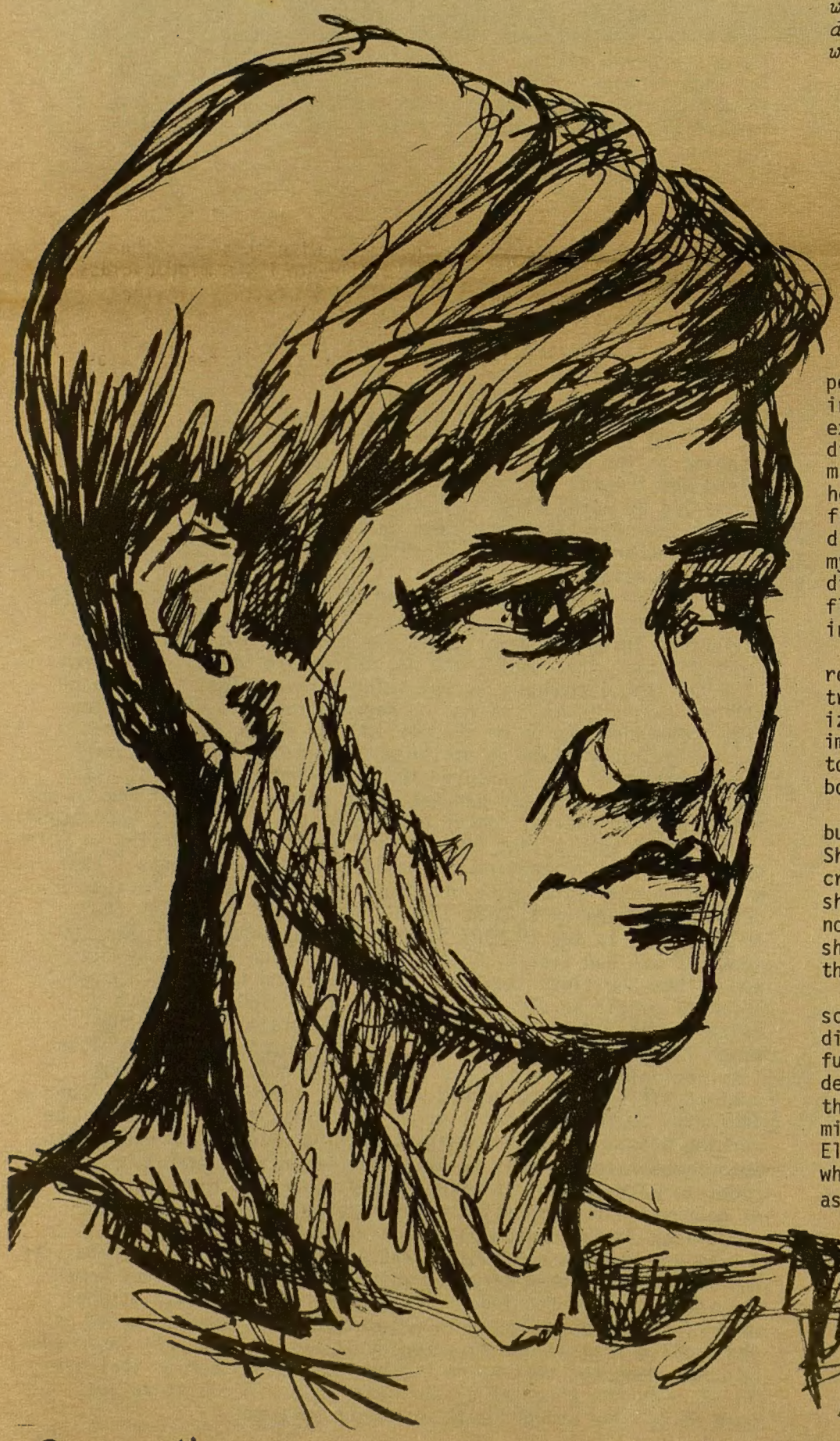
It took me a long time to not think there was something wrong with me since I could never really fit into the middle-class - university thing. I never could see that working class people don't fit in - that that's the way things are structured. Even if I saw that,I couldn't accept being working class (that meant all bad things to me). I had to keep believing I was an exception. One time one of my friends in high school told me that I was really lucky cause no matter what kind of clothes I wore I looked well bred. I treasured that compliment for years. It got me through countless parties where people knew just how to act and through an endless number of discussions I couldn't understand.

Now after such a long time of self denial I am starting to think about class. I'm starting to realize that disagreements I have with women over strategies and anaylsis aren't merely because I don't understand or I think things out more or less than they. I am beginning to see in many issues the class nature of the argument- to see how clearly I take the sides I do and middle class women take the sides they do. I am realizing that even though I think of myself as always relating to middle class women and being in middle class circles how all my close friends, the women I really get close to and love are working or lower class. I am beginning to see that it is no coincidence that I feel comfortable and can be honest with them. Most importantly I am beginning to realize that I am working class, that I'll always be working class - that that means something - something other than being embarrassed ; that my needs are important; that I have a right to make demands of middle class women and that in a scale of oppression the oppressed always are made to feel damaged in comparison to those who oppress and that that is wrong. That I know gay women are beautiful and strong through their oppression, not more damaged than straight women - that working class women only seem damaged to middle class women. That we must struggle with class as women- grope to understand how it has affected us. And realize that we are affected by it - that being all oppressed as women does not mean we do not oppress each other or that our anaylsis is not affected by the class bias and racist values most of us have brought with us to the movement.

dialogue

All the time i've been gay-identified--or identifying myself as gay--it's been less than a year--and i've been glad i was gay. But i keep thinking, you know, you don't just turn gay--like there's all these signals, things i remember that i see now in the context of gayness. But all the time i was falling in love with women--especially in high school--i didn't think i was a lesbian--i don't think i even saw it as wrong or sick, just painful. I had this liberal idea of bisexuality or idealistic love, something like that. That it was painful sort of made it fit the stereotypes, like romantic love is supposed to hurt. I guess i expected pain. People didn't shelter me from pain things. I felt unjustly treated--like, my love wasn't acknowledged, i was put down, people didn't take my suffering seriously. But i came to expect injustice.

This last thing about injustice & pain makes me think of it as a class feeling--but maybe middle-class gay experience is closer to it than lower-class straight--but this is really a connection, i think.



What you wrote made me start to think about the differences between being middle-class and gay like me, and working-class and gay like you. I realize there are important differences between us, but just this one seems to be very interesting. I never stopped to think before about how being middle-class affected my also being gay. But when I do, my mind seems to center on expectations--expectations that middle-class parents have for their children. It seems to the point also that when I think about expectations the picture that immediately comes to my mind is my mother being upset with me on two occasions. First, when I was arrested and put in jail and second when she discovered by reading some of our letters that I was having a relationship with a woman. Those two times of trauma stick out in my mind when I consider my relationship with my mother because those were the times she was most angry with me. She was angry because I was jeopardizing my future--my future that was wide open. In the first instance I was ruining my chances of getting into medical school and, of course, in the second instance I was ruining everything.

When Mom found out I was gay, she used her strong influence on me to convince me that I should go to a psychiatrist. She said I might think it was wonderful now, but in a few years I would be unhappy. I think happiness and expectations are a key to the connections between gay and class because before I was gay but, as you say, saw the signals even then, I was worried because I knew the values of my class, and knew what girls were supposed to be like and grow up to be. I also knew the values of my society said that people who were different than that wouldn't be happy. And of course I wanted to be happy because that was a value, too. Well, all this made me uncomfortable and pensive and I can remember that throughout all of high school I was obsessed with happiness. Everytime I would see someone I would wonder if they were happy and feel bad if I thought they weren't. I bet I wondered this around three times every waking hour for more than 5 years.

I used to dream of what it would be like not to be concerned with happiness. I imagined subsistence tribes in Africa and peasants in Europe who, from the pictures I'd seen, were both hard-working peoples that didn't have time to wonder about things not essential to making a living. Do you understand what I'm saying? That people for whom staying alive is hard would be happy just to get a period of rest, a holiday, a week-end. That would be happiness and not all this qualitative bullshit about directing your life in the best possible way for you, an individual who is unique.

One difference that makes it hard for me to understand your experience is our relationships with our parents--a difference in intensity, for one thing. I feel i didn't know what my parents' expectations were 'cause we just didn't know each other. My mother didn't have the kind of influence & control over me that would make her expectations so important to me. I didn't identify with her then. The people i wanted love& approval from were mostly friends my age. By the time i was in high school i was pretty distant (emotionally) from my family but i really identified with my friends' images of me, and with my own fantasy world, 'cause i didn't have a lot of friends. Some girls i knew had a lot of influence on me. And their support was what i valued. So i got into intense emotional, always unequal, relationships.

Like, i should have seen i was really gay when i was 15 and really wound up with Elaine. We were into a lot of the same trips but it seemed she was easily better at most things. I idolized her; we were close to each other but i knew i was not as important to her as she was to me. And i was physically attracted to her and we couldn't handle that. Sometimes i wished i was a boy so i could touch her and know she'd like it.

She had everything going for her in a real straight-success way but when i first knew her she didn't have all the proper ambitions. She was all the right categories--smart, beautiful looking, creative--for a woman to make it, except she was working class so she didn't have far out clothes and things. So people didn't notice her a lot until we were almost in 11th grade. Then i guess she realized where she was at and what she could do. She got into this class climbing thing.

She had become friends with these two men who taught at our school; they noticed her, and not in the way most males she knew did. They weren"t out to fuck her; they were gay. They mindfucked her to reject the working class identification which they despised in themselves. They had grown up in an even poorer city than ours and they had adopted the cultural bullshit of the upper middle class. They hadn't climbed much, though--but they thought Elaine could. She got right into it. Very quickly, she wanted what they wanted her to have. She decided to change her "style" as much as possible. First she dropped almost all of her friends

who wouldn't have fit into that, like we were all "gauche". She just quit relating to me. I wasn't cool.

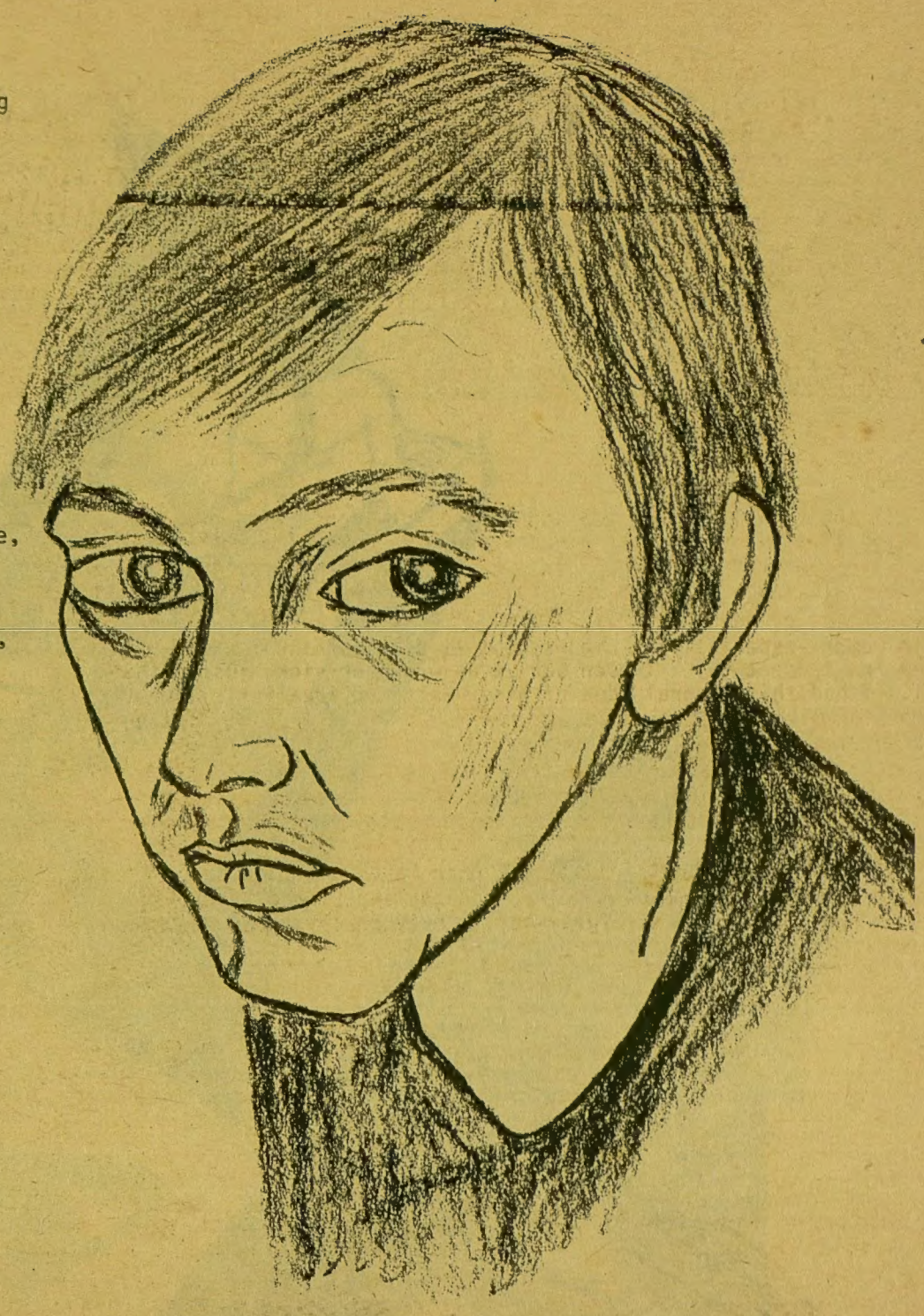
I couldn't understand it, i didn't want to and she just didn't care. I had never felt so totally rejected and desperate. Nothing i could say or do would affect her; but nothing she did or said would make me stop thinking about her.

Somehow, i didn't want to do what she was doing. I didn't get that encouragement from those two men--i didn't fit the image and by that time i hated them and thought they were full of shit. In the next two years i had classes from them and they didn't dig me either. I keep thinking now that i generalized that hatred into a distrust of gay men, and a stereotype of gay male culture as hypocritical, emotionally base, and elitist. And there's this class feeling about people who are on the way up, or are up, can't be trusted with my feelings. Or anything that could be sacrificed to their "cause".

The feelings i had for Elaine and that relationship stayed with me a long time. I fantasized a lot and i had crushes on other girls in high school. I felt i had been wronged, i was suffering from injustice. I guess if i'd been in a position like you, Carrie, that i'd have gone to a shrink or at least read a psych book and gotten all freaked out that i was a lesbian and blamed my pain on myself. But i wasn't aware of lesbianism, i didn't know any gay women; i didn't know till years later that my feelings had a name, fit a category--i thought i was very different from most women i knew and i just felt real isolated, 'cause i knew i couldn't talk to anyone about the feelings i really wanted to express, love for these women which included sexual feelings.

There is nothing I can say to add to your story about Elaine. It speaks for itself. However, it bothered me the way you talked of Elaine and her two gay male teachers. You seemed to juxtapose too closely that they were gay and therefore didn't care to fuck her with the fact that they fucked her mind because they convinced her to reject her working-class origins and aspire to middle-call
middle-class. What I mean is that the reason they mind-fucked Elaine wasn't because they were gay but because they were doing what they were supposed to do--teaching middle-class values. I guess I just thought you were too hard on them in view of what I've come to know of your struggle to regain an identification with your working-class background. From our discussions I've learned that all the women in AIAW that come from working-class backgrounds were fed middle-class values for a time and had to struggle earnestly to regain a consciousness of themselves as working-class.

I think we should be careful in judging oppressed people and always take into consideration necessity. Alot of the women in the gay cell have to pass for straight or they'll lose their jobs and alot more women in Iowa City that we don't even know sit at home alone or with one other woman and despise in themselves their way of life. But see, I'm safe saying all this because I have never been in a situation like you were in with those two working-class teachers, where you all three were of similar experience and yet instead of there being a kinship between you there was competition, denial and hatred. You were a threat to them because you reminded them of what they had been so they treated you badly. Your anger at them I can really understand--they had power over you. I've never been in such a situation with a gay woman who was using her power to make sure I didn't become a threat to her hard earned position. If such a situation did happen, I probably wouldn't hate her for being gay, but for her class privilege or her power. I wonder if you did the same thing? You mentioned that from your experience with these two gay, male, working-class teachers you gained a distrust of gay men and a prejudiced stereotype of gay male culture. Why didn't you distrust them for being working-class and why do I feel I wouldn't come to hate a gay woman with power over me because of her gayness? Maybe we can't because our identification with the common experience between us is too strong and would mean we would have to hate that experience in ourselves also. Maybe the hatred and anger that must come for preservation of self-esteem has to be grounded elsewhere.



I didn't feel i had anything in common with those men then--i didn't identify as working class, i thought i was middle class. *Middle class meant everybody. I was told i was in a similar* position to everyone i knew, but that i would have to make a great individual effort to find opportunities. I didn't really consider what i'd do if i didn't go to school. Instead of class differences, the divisions our teachers and parents set up were between those who wanted to go to college and those who didn't want to or didn't care (the ones who didn't care had to be middle class; the rest were mostly working class). Antagonisms between these two groups were encouraged by the authorities.

The girls who were college prep weren't supposed to have a very involving social life except as it related to "bettering" themselves. Strong personal relationships were ok for the girls who were going to work after high school, going out in the "real world". But we "intellectuals" were supposed to think of more academic things and study alot and become "leaders" and relate more to our teachers. Toward the end of high school it seemed like my personal relationships, that kind of need, were heavier than they were supposed to be. Like, i shouldn't get all hung up about loving people because that wasn't going to be important; i should devote my energies to study and self-reliance. So, how could i waste my time trying to rap with my closest friend about homosexual feelings? I just felt more&more isolated and different and wanting to leave & find people who were like me. But when i went to college the pressure was different--but i tried to go straight and middle class for a long time.

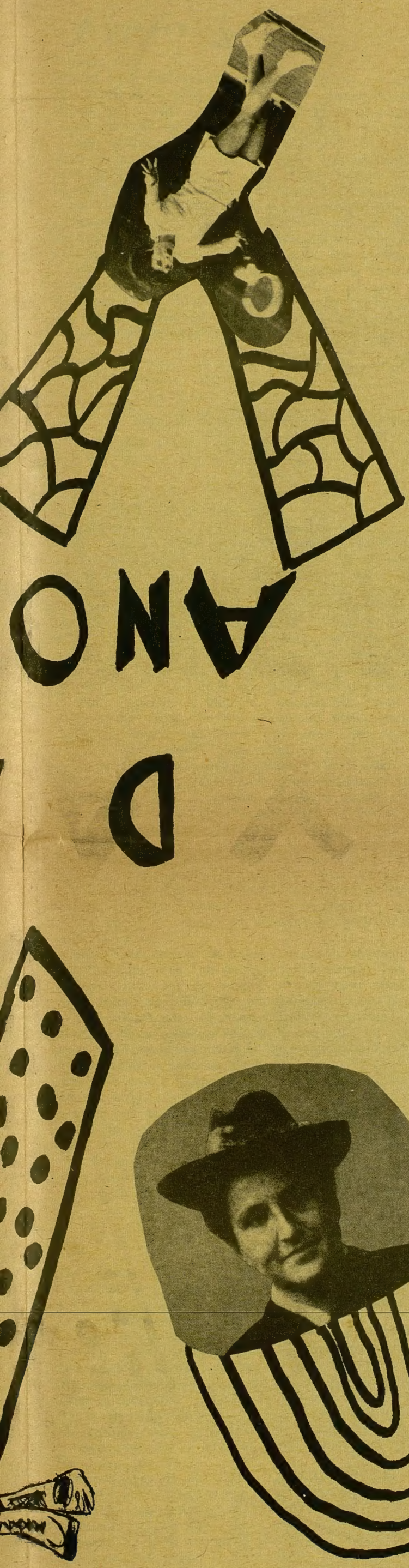
The idea keeps going through my head that being middle class made it more possible for you to act on your emotions and make love with a woman while i was much too scared to let myself act. But now i just got an insight on that: i kept falling in love with women who i didn't feel an equality with-- i felt like they were above me.

On Monday of the week we were to put out the paper, we read our dialogue for the collective. A good discussion followed and I learned some important things which I want to include as self-criticism.

We talked about my being so obsessed with happiness. I should have further explained that the reason I day dreamed so heavily about situations in which I would have to have been fighting for my life where group necessity might take precedence over individuals putting a lot of energy into creating the best possible life for them, was because I was having such trouble reconciling the kind of life I felt within me and the life I knew my society felt was the best for my happiness.

The sisters from the working class pointed out that I was romanticizing the working class life. The hard-working working class people who barely have any free time and are merely happy to get it is a middle class myth. Working class people are concerned with the quality of their lives and intricacies of happiness.

I have to criticize my analysis for being homosexist about those teachers. My awareness of homosexism is not together because that hasn't been a heavy identification for me-- i was into a women's consciousness before i came out & then i identified as a lesbian, but i still don't feel much solidarity with gay men and i know i've been unfair to gay men i've known. The class thing i feel more right about. But in struggling to become more conscious of my working class values and breaking out of that self-effacing, timid response to class antagonism, i can get pretty arrogant and respond to what i see as middle class jive in an also reactionary way.



Original Phrasing by Those Women from D.C.

These Articles are about junior high

Last year we were two students attending the ninth grade in one of Iowa City's Junior High Schools.

Before we started the school year we did not expect it to be the way it was. People kept saying it was a very nice school, the teachers were excellent, and the children were lovely.

After a few weeks there, losing all of our fears of the people there, we began to state our opinions of a few of the things we discussed in the classroom.

After our fellow students learned our beliefs about God, the war in Vietnam, marijuana, women's liberation and homosexuality, they felt that we were too much of a threat to their way of life and resorted to name calling.

Their favorite name to call us was Lesbian. When we quietly and calmly tried to explain to them that we were not homosexuals and that it made no difference to us whether or not a person was gay, they immediately decided that if you accepted homosexuality you must be gay.

They took pleasure in calling us junkie, hippie radical, crazy (although that was one of the nicer ones), gook, among many more. We learned to ignore this name calling after a while.

They resorted to writing obscene phrases on our lockers such as "fuck off hippie," "motherfucker," "fuck you" and other such things which showed to us the extent of their vocabulary and mentality.

Gym class was one of the favorite classes in which the oppressors verbally attacked people.

The whole gym class was appalled when you didn't wear a bra, shave your legs or armpits, or wore men's long underwear. The reasons why, we feel, that they were appalled was because they felt women should shave their legs and armpits, wear a bra, shouldn't wear long underwear, but they should be very feminine and wear clothes that are such.

Also in gym class, we were always picked last by the team captains to be on their teams. This happened even though we were good in the sport.

We were about the first people to wear long dresses. People would give us wierd stares and call us "witch." One girl told one of us that we looked like a "cute hippie" when we wore long skirts and dresses.

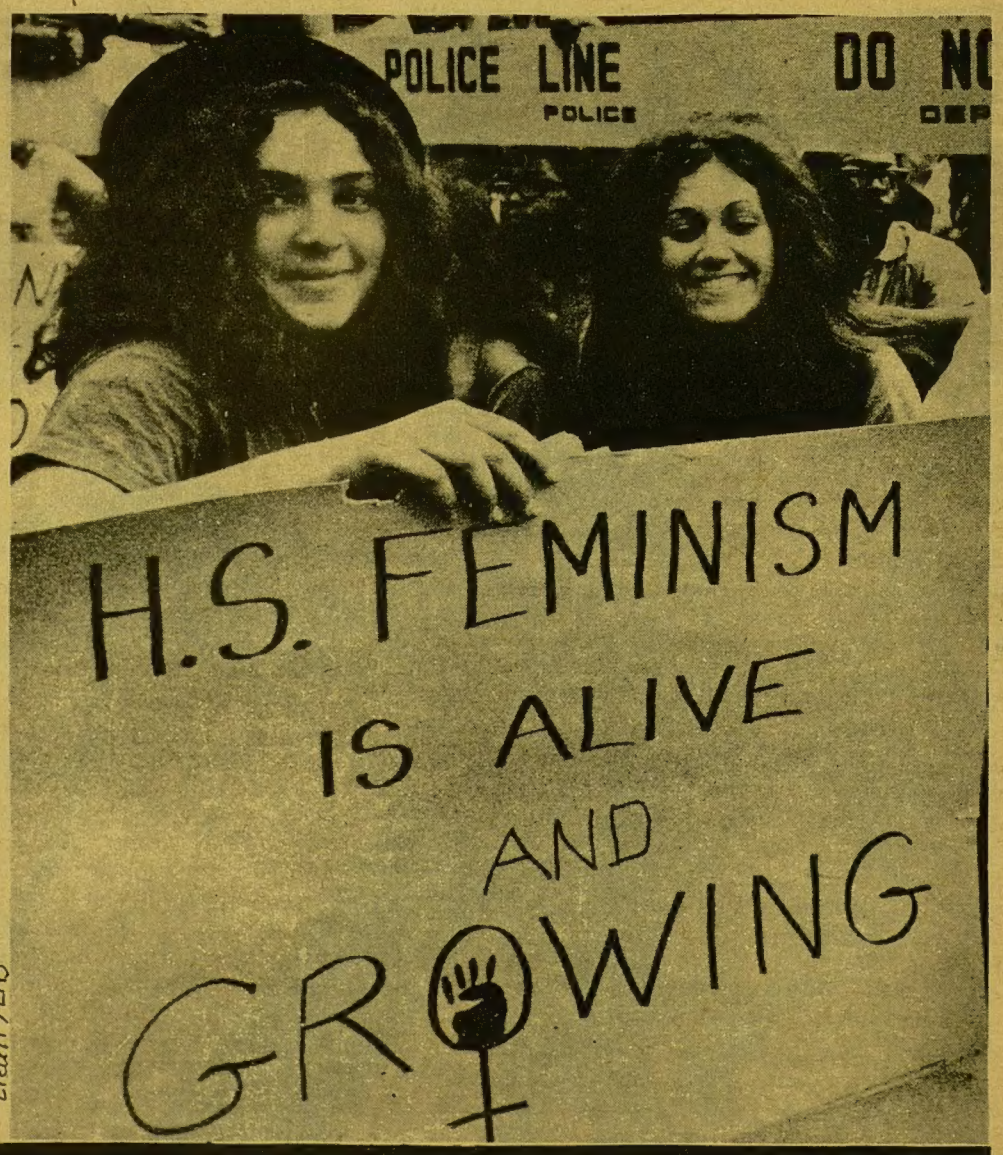
credit: Rising Up Angry

At the end of the year when the high school students were taking semester tests, some of them would come to the junior high to visit. One of our friends, known as the "short little greasy-haired kid," was kicked out of the school almost immediately when he came to visit. However, the former football stars and athletes of the junior high always seemed to get a warm reception and they always got to stay a longer period of time when they came.

Another incident took place one morning when these high school boys, including the "short little greasy-haired kid," came to visit. All of these boys had long hair. After they left we heard such comments as, "Who were those kids?" One teacher said he was going to find out who they were. He said it in a manner as if they were threatening the school.

These incidents were not infrequent but quite common and these along with a somewhat apathetic family made our ninth grade year an unforgetable experience.

credit/Rising Up Angry



credit/LNS

credit: Rising Up Angry

This year I taught junior high part time in Iowa City. It's my 4th year teaching but it was the only job open in the city and I was happy to get it because the school system has a reputation for being "liberal" in the state, and the last time I taught was in a small town 40 miles away where my politics and life style (at that time a lot more moderate) were threatening to the people and made a situation that was constantly upsetting to me.

So teaching in Iowa City was going to be fantastic. People, I thought, are used to a lot of different life styles and are more tolerant. That the year was anything but fantastic has made me realize a lot about the reality of public education in this country -- that it's an institution grounded in the middle class (no matter how "liberal") with all the sexism, homosexism and middle class moralizing that one could expect built right in.

One reason that the schools here have this liberal rep is that kids and teachers enjoy a lot of visible privileges. Teachers can run their classes pretty much any way they want. There's no dress code for students so they dress comfortably in whatever image they choose. The freedom of dress has helped cut down on the basic sex role stereotyping that was forced on girls having to wear dresses, and therefore sitting primly, not doing strong or uninhibited things, etc. In addition, the superintendent said early in the year that pants were OK for teachers to wear too. I don't think I wore a dress more than a half dozen times between October and May, when the hot weather came. Teaching in pants is real freeing -- just knowing you can climb on a desk to reach something or break up a fight without exposing yourself leads to a lot more confidence in relating to kids and feeling equal to any situation. If they want to learn yoga, we get on the floor and do yoga. Simple.

I guess if teaching meant just relating to kids I wouldn't have much to say that was negative. But schools are much more complex than that for everybody involved: kids have a whole bunch of teachers, there is a lot of diversity among kids themselves, and teachers are expected to get along, "work like a team" -- or at least not make waves.

The dress issue is a good example of the split between what seems free on the surface and the traditional, rigid sex role values that are applied with pressure by the institution. By now most people are aware that the reading materials and history taught in schools is overwhelmingly male-identified. Teachers with an awareness of the problem can provide a balance in their class, but what the kids get in other classes (and have gotten for years) is pretty hard to overcome. Girls who wear pants to school can still expect to be warned to "act like a lady," and many male teachers assume the right to comment negatively on the way individual kids dress, if what they wear is in some way too far out for the teacher's tolerance. Kids usually aren't cowed by that pressure into changing their style -- their clothes are a pretty handy rejection of straight teachers -- but nevertheless they get the message about the compromises required to make it in a straight world where people have more power than teachers.

Courses and sports are two other obvious institutionalized sex-role channeling devices. There's been some loosening of courses at my school -- a few girls take mechanical drawing, there's a "chef's club" for boys to learn to cook "convenience foods," but the home ec/shop split is pretty absolute. And by the time girls reach junior high they've been pretty socialized into the values they're spozed to have as far as courses go. But it's a lot harder for many girls to accept the overwhelming bias in favor of boys' sports. Until this year there was no way for a girl to get athletic recognition at school unless she was a cheerleader -- a function to rally the female students to support the heroic male athletes. Of course the cheerleaders were fantastic, since cheering was the only outlet for athletically talented girls. But in gym and through the intramural games held the girls knew they loved basketball. So last year 500 girls in the city signed a petition saying they wanted girls' basketball (it's an enormously popular sport in the state). But the administration said no -- the facilities were booked solid by boys' basketball, there was no money for it, and anyway they doubted there was really enough interest. The message was clear -- girls weren't as important as boys.

So this year the gym teachers were determined to do something with girls' sports and established a girls' track program. They got the support of other woman teachers who read up on track and helped coach, time and measure. The other two junior highs worked with us and set up their own programs, and the participation was overwhelming. A lot of girls went out whether they were "good" or not, because they knew this was the one chance for girls' sports to get anywhere. There were individual school meets and then a city-wide junior high meet.

But it wasn't easy. We had to mark out a track on the playing fields because the boys used the regular track. We couldn't use starting blocks because the boys got them and there was no money for more. High jumpers had to wait to practice until after the boys went to the showers. In addition the women who helped got hassled by lots of the male teachers -- jokes about not knowing what we were doing, the usual. One male told his classes that we couldn't coach because we'd never been trained, and besides it wasn't official unless you got paid. That really messed over some girls-- they got real upset that after all they wouldn't be allowed to have track, because in the men's eyes it wasn't "official." And of course a lot of boys picked up on that line and put down the girls. Dig it: you can wear pants and be strong but try to horn in on male privileges and the heat is on.

Needless to say there was a pretty sharp split between my educational philosophy and personal life style and that of many other teachers. But most of the friction I met was from the male staff. I refused to joke around with them the way most of the women were forced to do to keep things going smoothly, and I suppose my wearing pants became symbolic of that. I wasn't hassled in any really overt ways, but the subtle pressure of distain and dislike was constant. I chalked it off to just that, but the husband of the woman I shared a classroom with had a perspective that was probably pretty accurate. He said that the men hated me because I refused to relate to them with any sexual presence; because I wouldn't go along with the role of woman-as-sex-object that most women are forced to give in to, they were infuriated, threatened, and had to reject me.

It would've been a fruitless task to try to change them. But it was neat how much educating of kids got done about sexism and WL politics. During the year Women's Liberation speakers discussed with Family Living (sex ed) classes, most of the 9th grade English classes, and speech classes. Those of us on the faculty who were into WL were up front about it, and called kids on their sexism. A whole lot of kids learned to be really sensitive to the existence of sex bias -- they experience a lot of examples every day so there's no lack of exposure. It got to the point that a boy would start to say or do something, *catch himself, look around guiltily and* say "Oops, that's sexist." A girl could call a guy a "male chauvenist" and know it meant something both for her and him.

It was a lot harder to fight the homosexism that is rampant at the junior high level. It's real in to put down anyone who's different with homosexist slurs, and there's no one who's up front about being gay in school so there's no ready situations on a personal level. When minority experience was discussed in civics and English classes some kids would say liberal things about homosexuals having a right to live as they choose, but that had little effect on the routine homosexism that went on outside of class. (And naturally a lot exists among the faculty, especially the males.) But in the Spring a sex ed class invited two men from Gay Liberation to speak, and that really made radical changes in many kids and teachers, and brought out the deep homosexist bias of many other teachers and parents. One of the sex ed teachers nearly lost his job over it (he was removed from the Family Living program as a compromise, but only after he'd been fired and had a hearing that brought about his reinstatement). The GLF visit was the biggest topic of conversation of the year, and the main response among kids was relief. A lot of their fears and misconceptions were aired, there was specific oppression of gay people for them to relate to, and they saw first hand how much danger there was in even supporting the rights of homosexuals when one of the best and most popular teachers was nearly ruined by such action. Also, and most importantly, kids who have secret fears that they are gay themselves saw some positive support for that life-style, and I think it eased their minds a bit.

I have mixed feelings about this article because I am so down on public schools, but I know a lot of people have to work in a lot shittier situations without the privileges I had working in Iowa City. In a way that's part of my point -- if it's this bad here, then public education is really diseased, and trying to change it from within is a real disheartening task.

MACHO AND

MONOGAMY

Sometimes I feel like the woman's movement gets itself into these tight-assed instutionalized trips and ends up making you feel like you're back in the family or the church or school. *In other words*, sometimes we just can't escape our own rhetoric and dogma, and end up becoming a very repressive thing.

When the women's movement first started and a lot of us rejected traditional notions... oppresive notions...of what it meant to be a woman, of what was permissable female behavior, we were left with no identity. Like almost all the ways we used to act just wouldn't do in the context of a life as a revolutionary feminist. So we took off on this incredible fantasy and made up an idea of what the 'new woman' would be and proceeded to almost destroy ourselves and each other

trying to live up to our projection right now, immediately, here in the midst of the monster. We rejected the politics of guilt, but we used the tactic of guilt to push each other and ourselves to change.

It was a lot of bullshit, because developing into women with revolutionized consciousness is a process, not an act or a decision. Moreover, it is ridiculous at this early point with so few women, relatively ,involved in it, to pretend that we could set up a model so soon. I mean we come to the women's movement as pretty demented fucked-up distorted personalities. That's what oppression does to you.

Like, macho and monagamy are the two best examples I can think of. 'Macho' and 'monogamy' are hard to define in the way that the women's movement uses them. But generally when you're called 'macho', they're trying to say that you're acting butch, that you're playing at being a man, that you're aggressive. Mostly when you're being called macho as an attack they mean that you're generally acting like some male stud. (Macho' comes from the Latin word machismo which basically means male chauvinist pig.)

'Monogamy' is a word used in a million different ways. It usually refers to two people who are lovers, and who may be into each other to the point of exclusion of others. In heterosexual monogamy, the woman is usually dependent on her man and lives through him, instead of with him.

A lot of women in the women's movement criticize macho women a lot, and spend a lot of energy avoiding 'taking on the characteristics of men.' They fell that macho intimidates and alienates other women. But it seems to me that growing up female and gay in Amerika is what intimidates and alienates women and makes us afraid of strengths of any sort. But just rejecting macho as inherently bad, as a rule we set up, doesn't deal with the real problem which is that men have always used strength against us, against all oppressed peoples, and it is the misuse of strength which leads to domination, not the existence or style of strength.

I don't worry about macho in women.. in fact I encourage it... because I feel the thing we have to worry about the most is how we are all going to get out of the behavior and gestures of feminity; how we're going to stop seeing ourselves as weak and passive. Women who are trying to be strong and tough have a rough time of it, because we don't have any forms to be that in.

There are a bunch of characteristics that exist in people. In sexist society, some of those characteristics are called feminine (gentleness, delicacy, sweetness, supportiveness, emotion, etc.) Some of them are called masculine(strength, power, aggression, arrogance, technical competency, achievement,etc.) Now the problem with sexism isn't that men have technical competence and physical prowess: the problem is that ONLY men can legimately have these characteristics, and that their skills and aptitudes are used against women and therefore become perverted. Technology, like physical strength, is not inherently bad, It's the oppressive applications that reek. In the hands of the right people(oppressed people) almost all competencies can become constructive energy sources. So if we in the women's movement reject as 'male' every characteristic assigned to men by pig society, then we're accepting their sexist categories and I don't understand how we intend to win our war. If women start strutting around(instead of swishing about) and start wearing leather jackets(instead of dainty cloth coats) and chewing on toothpicks and swearing alot and getting into fights(instead of sitting at home polishing our toenails) well that doesn't seem to me such a crisis. I'm worried about our tendencies to be submissive and to eat more shit than is good for our souls, to subordinate our struggle to other struggles out of guilt, to be wimpy and scared and paralyzed.

Once it is not a dramatic act to walk down the street holding hands with our girlfriends, once rejecting rape-minded advances isn't guerilla theatre, once wanting to be a plumber isn't 'cute'.. then we may be free enough to develop whole new ways of being strong.

I don't understand what feminists mean when they say we should totally reject role-playing. I don't understand what I would do, how I would act, if I didn't role-play. It's not like we're so free, our vibes are so clear, and we are so unfettered that there is some 'natural' way of being. One makes decisions about one's behavior every time she acts in any way. Like when I stopped wearing makeup and miniskirts, and I wondered how I should dress, feminists told me to just dress with whatever was at hand and was practical. Now that is ridiculous. I have to go out and rip off or buy anything that might just 'be at hand'.. clothes don't spring into my drawers on their own. The thing I actually had to do, was pick a new role, a new set of behavior patterns. And I think it's real cool for women to experiment with all sorts of roles and all sorts of mannerisms until something really does click and feels natural.

It's the same with defenses. Feminists are always talking about breaking down defenses. Well that seems to me to be suicidal. We're living in this evil jungle where the last thing I plan to be is defenseless. The women's movement should help us develop BETTER defenses it seems to me.

It should help us develop more control over our defenses, so that we are able to let them down when we're sure it's safe. But who the fuck can win a war without self-defense on every level. I will not give up my aggressiveness and my macho because I want to survive until the time that they become irrelevant to my happiness.

Then there's another piece of dogma that a lot of us dragged with us from the straight woman's movement. Smash monogamy. In the very beginning of the

feminist movement I remember that we were all real concerned with smashing unequal oppressive dependent power relations. Then Weathermen(a sexist male-dominated, military oriented organization) came out with a smash-monogamy-of-any-sort-line. And you could see a real change in the politics of the women's movement..cause I guess it felt it had to top any line about women that Weathermen put out.

I have urged women to smash their monogamies lots of times. Their heterosexual monogamies. I did that because it is hard for me to concieve in this point of history anything very liberated happening between one man and one woman. I did that because it's hard for me to understand why women with generally high conciousness spend their energies in intimate struggle with men. But I didn't do it because the form of monogamy is somehow inherently destructive. Like I don't think I meant smash those relationships, or smash the bad parts of them. It's not the intensity, the monogy of a relationship that makes or breaks it... it's the content of the relationship.

When Weatherman said smash monogamy they meant that each woman should put out for lots of boys instead of just one. That's not exactly my idea of the road to liberation. What we really want to smash is domination, stifling possessiveness, manipulation, brutality, etc. and those things turn up all the time in all kinds of relationships from the most casual to the most intense.

I guess dogma is a way not to deal with the actualities of our lives. When your main concern is smashing monogamy, that leaves a lot of different kinds of relationships that don't get scrutinized and criticized so much. When you attack women for being macho because it scares you, you don't deal with your own timidity, your own oppression.

I am involved, as you might guess, in a very intense, close monogamous relationship. And a lot of my freinds in the movement have been laying down subtle criticisms of that. But so far, no one has really been upset about the monogamy. It's an excuse for other things. Like some people have been upset because I haven't seen them much and instead of saying they miss me and feel rejected, they say smash monogamy. Some of my sisters feel threatened by my being closer to Wendy than with them. Some straight women feel very freaked out that two women can actually love each other with such intensity. These straight women are really uptight, because they criticize us on the basis of 'correct' ideas they got from their heterosexual experiences, as if those ideas could possibly relate to our Lavender Vision. Moreover, when they see two women really digging each other, then they know lesbianism is for REAL and they get a bit scared that it might zap in on them.

One of the reasons people give for their 'smash monogamy' line is that collectivity is better than individuality. They say that it is better to get your sense of identity and security from a group of close sisters than from just one person. Well, in the last few years in the women's movement, I have not seen too many collectives provide any kind of stable support for any individual. I was in a very tight disciplined, close collective all last year and looking back at it now, I can't remember a time in my life that I felt so weak and so dependent. Instead of being dependent on one person, I was dependent on the 'collective'..not really on the other women in the collective, just on the collective. But the 'collective' didn't exist on its own, outside of being made up of all of us. And because everything was so fucking 'collective' we never really were able to build relationships inside it which gave us what we needed.

I also haven't seen many collectives that last too long. The form is an experimental one. Although my collective last year was the most important political experience I ever had, second to coming out, I took a lot of losses in it. We all did. I'm not too sure how I feel about collectives, but I'll never throw myself, lose myself, in one again like I did last year.

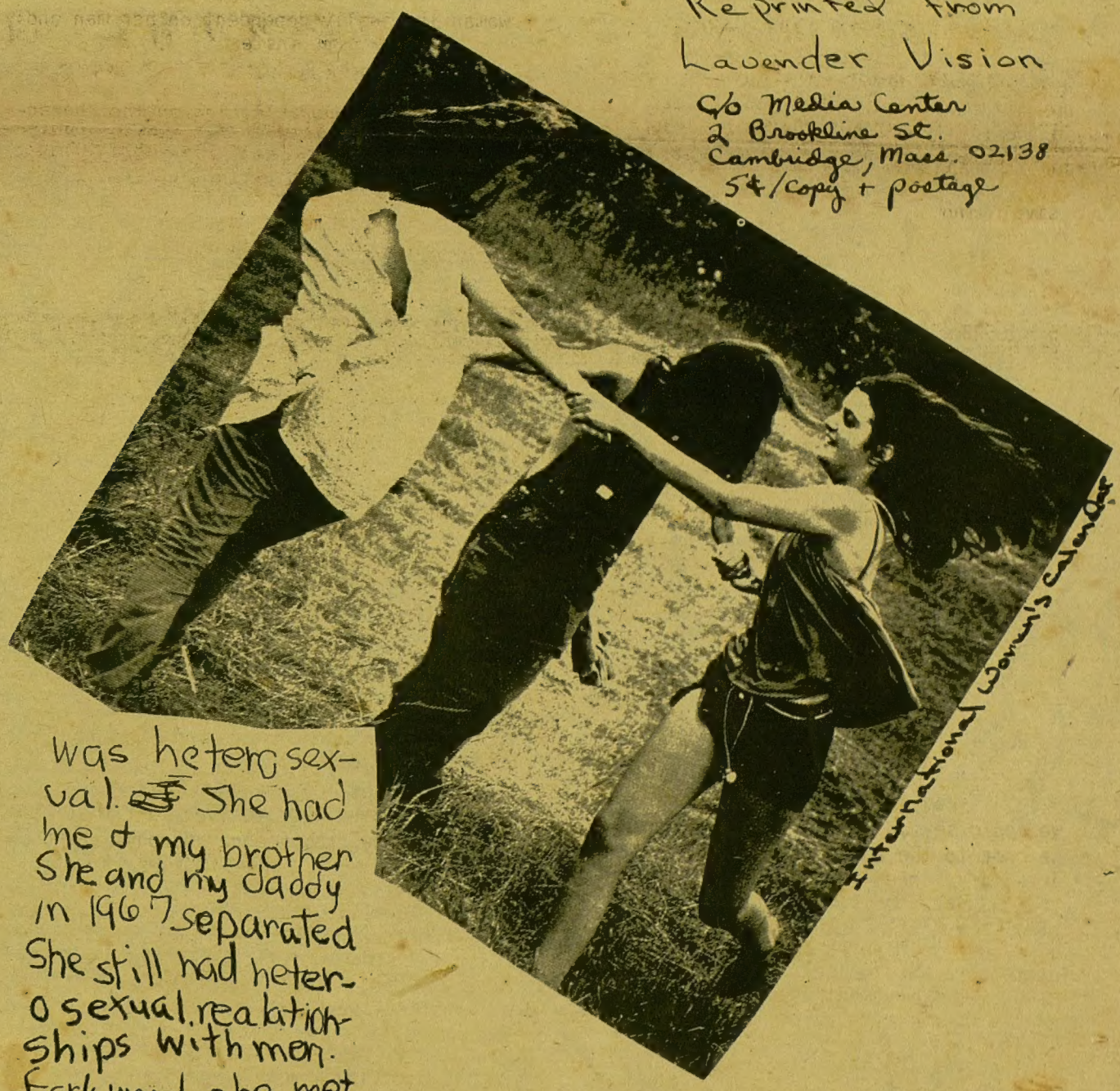
With Wendy I feel very secure. It gives me a lot of strength to be very certain of being loved. I have never done good politics of lived a nice life except when I was feeling good and strong. And being a lesbian in this society requires alot of strength.

Until there is actually some form which looks better to me, not in theory or fantasy..but in concrete practice than my monogamous relationship with Wendy, I don't see why I should smash monogamy. Although I souldn't have said this last year, I now forsee a post-revolutionary situation where a whole spectrum of forms exists, all sorts of numbers, all sorts of different levels of collectivity. I'm not going to give up the best relationship of my life because in the context of the straight women's movement I developed a theory which gains the goods for me, not one which requires I strip myself of the few things which make me feel good. Since I came out and since I got into self-defense, I've never felt better about myself. For me, macho and monogamy have been the wonder drugs that my women's conciousness has produced, to defend against the virus of dogma.

Reprinted from
Lavender Vision
C/O Media Center
2 Brookline St.
Cambridge, Mass. 02138
5¢/copy + postage

TAMI KALLEN

My mother
When she
was little she had
tough life, she worked
very hard, she
lived very hard
The first 5 yrs of
her life she was
very skinny & dying
But thank heavans
she lived And
soon she got
chubby. Soon
when she was in
her teens she
went on dates
with boy & girl
frends, Later oh
she met my
father, she then
married him and
was hetero sex-
ual. She had
me & my brother
She and my daddy
in 1967 separated
She still had heter-
o sexual. rea lation-
ships with men.
Early march she met
Donna & they loved
each other & made
love and was a les-
bian.



The END

Reprinted from Dykes For An
Amerikan Revolution - D.C.
Easter Day Press

A Woman?

recollections from a new perspective

There never was any talk of divorce between my parents -- I think they both like and/or need the relationship they have. My father is the decision-maker in every important way, though he always discusses things with my mother because she supports him completely. They both finished college (their families have been middle class forever) but my mom was a home ec major and my dad was in engineering, so there's no role competition between them.

I've been trying to figure out the values I got from my family -- where I learned to measure my self-worth. My school work was always praised and I learned to be a very high achiever. The rewards I got were never money or privileges but the knowledge that my parents were proud of me, they approved of me, and therefore I was a good person. What knowledge I learned in school was important not because I was smart and therefore good, but because my parents (especially my father) were gratified and they judged me good.

The pattern established led me to look for my self-concept in the opinion of others -- first my father, and later other people I respected. So the value I learned overwhelmingly was to earn justification through personal relationships...not, of course, self-directed relationships because I always granted the other person the power to set my goals and evaluate my progress.

It's amazing how much like my mother I am in that way. The reason such a discovery is surprising is that I identified so strongly with my father during most of my life. I was a whiz in math and science, never did artistic stuff which my mom was really talented in. Although both parents praised me I knew it was daddy who set the criteria.

The reason my growing up failed to go smoothly is that I'm a girl. I never located the contradiction between my father's encouragements and notion of what I should be with what he valued and needed in my mother. He wanted me to be "independent," yet obviously his happiness depended on a woman who deferred to him consistently. How could I do both?

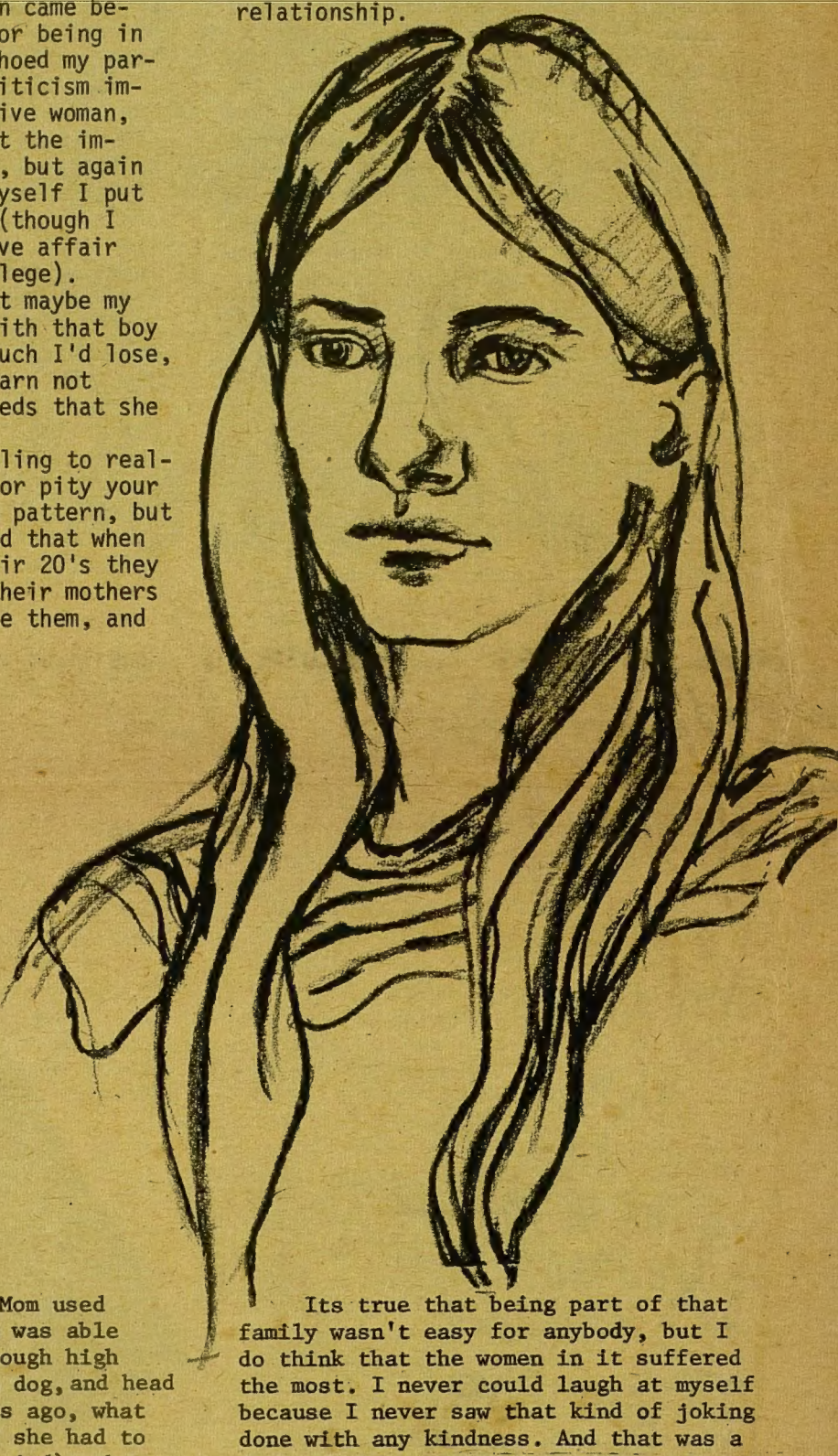
I tried to though. When I was a sophomore in high school I started going with this boy who had a lot of the surface confidence of my father. Although he wasn't as smart as I was in school, he knew a lot more about emotional and psychological competition that I did. We developed a relationship that, by the time we were seniors, we were convinced was the ultimate in maturity and love. He dominated me with loving care and every emotional recrimination in the book. I was blissful.

My parents hated him. I couldn't understand it. But it wasn't until just recently that I realized my confusion came because I was being criticized for being in a relationship that exactly echoed my parents'. By extension daddy's criticism implied that he needed a submissive woman, but he didn't value one. I felt the implied disrespect for my mother, but again couldn't name it. To protect myself I put my mother down in my own mind (though I didn't get out of my destructive affair until I was a sophomore in college).

I'm not sure about this, but maybe my mother hated my relationship with that boy so much because she knew how much I'd lose, and she sensed that I could learn not to have those self-limiting needs that she accepted in herself.

It's really a fantastic feeling to realize you don't have to despize or pity your mother. I don't know if it's a pattern, but a lot of women I know have said that when they were a few years into their 20's they suddenly began to understand their mothers and the many ways they are like them, and not have to reject that.

The hardest lesson to unlearn has been the one about deriving my self-concept from the judgements of people I respect and want to love me. Approval and love have been directly connected in my mind for so long, and approval was always on the other person's terms. The smallest disapproval meant loss of love through rejection, and I feared that because if I wasn't loved then I didn't deserve to be loved: I was a bad person. One of the reasons I got divorced was that I knew I could never learn to deny my husband the power to judge me, even though the judgement I inferred was often in my own head. The pattern was so well established that I knew I couldn't break out of it in the context of that relationship.



When I was a kid, my Mom used to say that as soon as she was able (that is, when we were through high school) she would take the dog, and head for Reno. A couple of years ago, what she was saying was that if she had to do it over again (get married), she didn't think she would.

I think she was fearful for us girls, perhaps afraid that her situation would be repeated. One way for at least part of that to change was to be financially independent. I never can recall hearing much about a career, just the absolute necessity of a college degree, ('they can take away everything', my mother who never had anything would say, 'but your education').

I think all the values I got when I was growing up were defined by my Dad. It wasn't complicated, what men did was justifiable and logical; what women did was neither. So on the one hand, while I would take something like a physics course to please my Dad, if I did well in it, it was put down.

It must have been one of my smart-ass periods, I can remember my Mom saying something like who'd think such a smart girl could have such dumb parents. It took me a while, I'm afraid to say, to see what she meant. How she kept her image of herself intact, I don't know.

Its true that being part of that family wasn't easy for anybody, but I do think that the women in it suffered the most. I never could laugh at myself because I never saw that kind of joking done with any kindness. And that was a lot of the humor that existed: putting people into a bind, and then laughing at them.

In spite of my 4 years of math, and doing well in it, I never thought I had any aptitude for it, what I thought was that I was just good at memorizing formulas. It wasn't until a year or so ago that I realized that I could understand some things about math and statistics. Women weren't supposed to really understand, or be good at it.

It's funny, the other thing I thought I wasn't good at was getting along with people. With good reason -- all I remembered how to do was bicker. Even now I tend to criticize instead of discuss. My thing was that I'd have a few close friends, you had to really know me to like me. What took longer was realizing I could respect women, one, then two or three. Even that was ass-backwards. It's one thing to respect women by male standards, but to understand how women's place is intertwined with women's image, and see that in women you know, is easier said than done.

Woman's Song

My body
is a weapon
It isn't soft
In many places
My hands
Are knives and hammers
For bashing in
The faces
of men
Who won't allow me
My humanity.

My legs
Are locomotives
For getting out
of situations
For making distance
Separate me
From all
The provocations
of men
Who can't forgive me
My integrity.

My eyes
Are calculators
For planning out
The moves required
To get
from where I am
To where
I want to be.

My body
Is like my sisters'
And we make love
With each other.
My hands
often caress them
While we
Create a new world
For women
Who at last have
Our humanity!

I am a woman
For a new time
Ticking hours
In my sister's minds.
I am an engine
For a new plan
Like a pistol
In my sister's hand.